

OIA
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Dear Senator Durenberger:

I received your letter this morning with its kind words about our efforts on the Intelligence Information Act. We have worked diligently through the spring and summer to reach agreement with you and your colleagues on this bill. We have done this because we are convinced, as you are, that the bill will relieve us of a needless burden without harming the interests of the press, authors, or the public at large. I am gratified to hear you say that as a result of our efforts you will be able to support this bill. I certainly believe it merits everyone's support.

Your views regarding the need for an accurate historical record are ones that I certainly share. If Congress is willing to provide the resources, I would be happy to institute a new program of selective declassification review of those materials that we believe would be of greatest historical interest and most likely to result in declassification of useful information. Such a careful review of certain non-designated or de-designated materials could indeed make an important contribution to the historical record, and thus to public understanding of how this country has met the challenges of the last generation.

The term "selective" is very important. There is no point in reviewing files that we basically know will contain little releasable information. And it makes no sense to review -- or even to release -- material that has become releasable only because it is trivial. Our professionals have a pretty good sense of what is likely to prove releasable; and we would be happy to work with our Historian, other agency historical offices, the Archivist of the United States, and others to determine what topics are of the greatest interest and importance. Historians would have to trust us, however, to make these professional judgments in good faith. A declassification review program could function only if we maintained control over the workload and concentrated our limited resources on the areas where they would do the most good.

One certain consequence of this selectivity would be a concentration of our efforts on the review of older, as opposed to more recent, material. Such material which documents the early years of CIA could well yield releasable information that illuminates the increasingly important role intelligence has played in the development of peace-time foreign policy. As a general rule, we are likely to limit the declassification review program to files at least 20 or 30 years old. However, these older files would certainly be found to contain information which continues to be relevant to today's world. I am sure that whatever material we would release would make a major contribution to historical research and interpretation.

At the moment, I do not know whether our small historical staff would be in a position to manage a selective declassification review program, even with the addition of up to a dozen personnel. But no matter where such a program would be placed organizationally within the Agency, I understand that what you are suggesting is a program where those personnel would have the mission of declassifying and releasing historical materials that no longer required protection. I would see to it that those personnel worked with the Historian of the CIA to develop a program that picked important topics for review which would result in the release of usable historical materials.

Please allow me to again express my appreciation for your support of S.1324. With the enactment of this important legislation and the achievement of the necessary budget support, I believe this Agency would be more than willing to undertake a new selective declassification review program. With your leadership and support, we can forge a workable means of informing the public while still protecting our nation's secrets.

Sincerely,

William J. Casey